

**Easter Reflection: “Resurrecting Hope”
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Reading the writings of William Houff

There are few things more difficult in life than starting over.

**And yet, that is what life is about –
being born... and dying... and being born again.**

**The poet Kenneth Patchen has written:
“There are so many little dyings
that it doesn’t matter which of them is death.”**

The same cannot be said for birthings.

**Each beginning is unique;
we have never met it before,
and initially we wonder how we will ever meet its challenges.**

**Beginnings are such a problem for some people
that they decide they will have no more.**

**They have arrived;
they may even try to go back.**

**But existence is not put together that way,
and when we elect to allow no more beginnings
we open the way for the dyings to take over.**

**Death and rebirth – these are the theme of this season;
Each is contained in the other –
rhythm and balance
within which lies the wholeness of life.**

**When we accept the dyings,
then the beginnings come easily,
and where the beginnings are welcome
death, in truth, loses its sting.
“Beginnings with end,” thus spake Sam Keen.
“I have learned one important thing in my life,...
how to begin again.”**

Reflection“Resurrecting Hope”

The world as we know it is always dying to us, always being born anew. In our story this morning, Babushka must say goodbye to the feathered friend she has healed, so that Rechenka can return to her kind in the wild. Babushka knows that she will not see the goose again. But the very next day, the young gosling is born, a brand new miracle who cannot replace Rechenka, but who offers a new gift of friendship, all her own.

I think of our life as a Fellowship this past year. We said good-bye to an old friend, our home at Pohl Road, knowing we would not see it again in the same way. Now, this place, our new home welcomes us into a new friendship. One does not replace the other, rather we find ourselves in the mysterious cycle of endings and beginnings, small dyings and miraculous birthings. So it is with all of our days. Newborns transform themselves into children racing down church aisles. Children leave home to create lives of their own. Friends and loved ones come into our lives and leave them. We throw ourselves into jobs, and one day move on to new ones or retire to the next chapter of our lives. Throughout our lives, some roads are chosen, some are never taken, and some are changed forever beyond our power to chose. Even when these transformations bring us joy, there can still be a sense of loss for days gone by, others moments of meaning, which are all too fleeting.

Dyings and birthings. Endings and beginnings. William Houff reminds us that the dyings are inevitable. Life will change, whether we want it to or not. But the beginnings, he warns, are optional. If we cease to welcome the beginnings, the dyings take over, and despair and hopelessness, regret and remorse set in. In warning us, he does not argue that we should try to conquer death, once and for all, only that we should not allow it more power than its due. Death is a reality in our lives, dying a given, but it is only one source of the truth of our humanity. The other, more important reality lies in the new life which is constantly being born around us, the endless possibilities which creation offers to our days, even in the midst of our good-byes.

Houff’s warning and encouragement come to us after a long and hard winter. Many of us have known death and loss, while some of us have celebrated new life and fresh starts, but too often in the last year the dyings have seemed to prevail. Death and tragedy have filled our world at large, both through human hands and nature’s force, leaving us feeling out of control and often unseen and unheard. The tragedy of Red Lake is fresh in our minds, as is the battle for Terry Schiavo’s right to live or die. And yet, here we are, on the cusp of spring, ready to rejoice in the return of long, sunlit days, ready to welcome the freshness of the waking world, ready to greet the new life that is already in the bud. What was it that sustained us,

until these first bright days? What keeps us going, when we were not sure we have the strength left within us to face the world's dying?

Look back. Take a moment to remember, and I suspect that you will discover that even amid the days of your despair, there were some small beginnings which beckoned. In the presence of death, our families and friends gathered around us, making new connections and recommitting themselves to being a faithful presence in our lives. In the presence of illness and on the long path of healing, routines were abandoned and rearranged, so that life could slow down to embrace only those things which truly matter. In the battles of an election year, diverse groups of people united around their visions of justice and democracy and formed unlikely coalitions, in which they learned from each other. In the wake of the hurricanes and tsunamis, friends and strangers reached out to one another, offering warmth and hospitality, across the miles. It can be easy to overlook such blessings born in the midst of our trials, since we prefer to think of miracles as sudden events, coming down from on high to make all our problems and pains disappear. But in truth, these small beginnings – small acts of love and hope and decency – these are the real miracles of our humanity, which refuse to be defeated and refuse to die.

These are Easter moments, moments when the hope of our hearts is resurrected out of our tears of pain and despair. They remind us that even in the presence of death, there is always the choice to begin again. I think of that first Easter, long ago, as Jesus' friends and disciples stood before his empty tomb. It was a time of endings – an ending to their friendship, to his young life, to his ministry, which had just begun to flourish. Yet, had it only been a time of despair, had it only been a time of endings, we, who sit here today would never have heard of the Rabbi of Nazareth. We might never have been asked to wrestle with a message of love, which embraces all, even the lepers and prostitutes, the slaves and outcasts. We might never have been asked to ponder what it would mean for the meek to inherit the earth or for the rich not to enter heaven. But the disciples stood before the tomb, and recognized that the message and vision of their friend lived on in their hearts. And in that simple recognition, came the beginning of their own call to service, their own dedication to the work of hope and love. It may have seemed like a small, inadequate beginning to them, but it was one which in the end had the power to transform their lives and redeem Jesus' fate.

“I have learned one important thing in my life,” observes Sam Keen, “how to begin again.” It may not ever be an easy thing to do, but Easter comes to us, the miracle of Spring arrives at our doorsteps, to remind us that we need not learn how to begin again alone. The disciples stood together before the tomb. The earth awakens in a complex chain of events from the smallest flower to the migration of the great whale. The community of Red Lake comes together now in a bond that is deeper than anything they have known before. Out of our dyings, the resurrection comes as heart speaks to heart, as life calls to life, as hope inspires hope in a

language as ancient and timeless as Nature herself.

Dyings and birthings. Endings and beginnings. The great mystery of which we are a part on this amazing blue-green earth. May we rejoice in a world which has the awesome power to renew itself and remove death's sting with love. What more of a miracle do we need for our days? Another Easter has come, when we needed it most. May we rejoice and choose to begin again.